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Blurring Borders: Scottish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century

Jonathan Murray

More and more often, to watch and think about twenty-first-century Scottish cinema is to be transported beyond a single set of territorial and cultural borders. Yet, from the late 1970s, academic discussion of Scottish film traditionally saw the representation and reformation of national identity by indigenously based film-making talent, the creation of 'alternative discourses... adequate to the task of dealing with the reality of Scottish life' (McArthur 1982: 3), as an evolving local production sector's main *raison d'être*. Such priorities undoubtedly cast helpful light upon the defining characteristics of earlier eras within Scottish film history. They also provide a valuable reminder of a vibrant national cinema's capacity to engage domestic audiences in shared processes of discussion and self-definition. Yet with each passing year, the idea of a deliberate, dominant and didactic focus on the question of nation seems less and less applicable to more and more of the cinema which contemporary Scotland produces. This is not to say that belief in Scottish cinema's capacity 'to play an important role at the heart of a revitalised national culture in reflecting the diversity of contemporary Scottish experience' (Petrie 2000a: 226) ought to be junked overnight. It is, though, to argue that criticism must be prepared to acknowledge and explore the full range of contemporary Scottish film-makers' creative and cultural ambitions. The latter both include *and* extend beyond the desires of an inwardly focused celluloid commentariat.

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Compared to the 1990s, the twenty-first century's opening decade saw levels of Scottish feature production increase only modestly. The same period, however, saw the range of genres inhabited and issues explored by Scottish film-makers expand rapidly. For instance, many Scottish writers and directors whose careers began at home during the local production upsurge of the late 1990s (for more detail, see Petrie 2000b) went on to spend much of the 2000s examining societies and working within film industries located outside Scotland's borders.¹ The contemporary Scottish cinema of *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, Ire/GB, 2002), *The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin Macdonald, GB, 2006), *Summer* (Kenny Glenaan, GB/Ger, 2008) or *We Need To Talk About Kevin* (Lynne Ramsay, GB/USA, 2011) is one defined by international migration and exploration on the part of local artists. Alternatively, one might acknowledge the marked rise of low-budget genre production within Scotland during the last decade. A determinedly populist Scottish cinema, one created by film-makers who choose (or are compelled) to remain locally based, either rejects outright detailed interrogation of native society and identity in ostentatious detail, or does so in oblique and novel ways. The contemporary Scottish cinema of *Wild Country* (Craig Strachan, GB, 2005) and *Outcast* (Colm McCarthy, GB/Ire, 2010) subjects council estate teenagers to all manner of unlikely lycanthropic travails; the *Outpost* (Steve Barker, GB, 2008) franchise produces unapologetically outré fantasies of undead Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* lurking in abandoned central European Second World War bunkers; *The Purifiers* (Richard Jobson, GB, 2004) turns nocturnal Glasgow into an anonymous dystopian metropolis of the proximate future, a hostile and perilous space controlled by dictatorial corporate interests and policed by vigilante gangs who fuse cyberpunk and Asian martial arts cinema aesthetics in their appearance and behaviour.

One could easily list several other important twenty-first-century trends which complicate traditional conceptions of Scottish cinema as a collective creative endeavour that is geared primarily or exclusively towards an examination of the meaning and identity of 'Home'. Indeed, this essay will go on to examine two such movements within 2000s Scottish film-making. The first involves a decade-long process of strategic collaboration with Scandinavian counterparts; the second relates to local film-makers' recent interest in themes of ethnic and racial diversity, conflict and exploitation, whether domestically or globally framed, past or present day. In the case of both movements, I identify and analyse the work of particular individuals and institutions that proved exceptional with regard to the amount of feature work

which they produced during the early 2000s. At the same time, however, I also suggest that these individual success stories are also markedly representative case studies: they illustrate some of the main directions in which early twenty-first-century Scottish cinema has developed as a whole. With regard to Scottish-Scandinavian co-production, a great deal of my discussion explores the output of Sigma Films, a Glasgow-based independent production company established in 1997 by producer Gillian Berrie, actor Alistair Mackenzie and director David Mackenzie. In the years since the company's feature-length debut, *The Last Great Wilderness* (David Mackenzie, GB/Den, 2002), Sigma has acted as lead or co-producer on no fewer than seventeen further feature projects, a record unmatched by any other Scottish independent. In the case of films exploring questions of ethnicity and race, the work of screenwriter Paul Laverty is singled out for special attention. The most prolific Scottish screenwriter of the late 1990s and early 2000s, Laverty made his feature debut with the script for the English director Ken Loach's *Carla's Song* (GB/Sp/Ger, 1996); since then the pair have collaborated on another eleven projects, the most recent of which, *The Angel's Share* (Ken Loach, GB/Fr, 2012), is in post-production at the time of writing.

The combined example of Sigma and Laverty, not to mention that of the other films and film-makers examined below, illustrates an argument I have advanced elsewhere (Murray 2007: 90). This is the idea that contemporary Scottish film criticism needs to go where contemporary Scottish film-makers have already gone. We must learn to see explicit and extended representation of nation as but one of many creative possibilities to explore from a local perspective. A more traditional view of Scottish film criticism, as a vehicle used to canonise what Blain (2009: 776) calls a leftist and realist 'central spine... attached to the notion of a characteristically Scottish film and television product' and to a national cinema reductively equated with 'Bill Douglas' *Trilogy*, the [Peter] McDougall/[John] Mackenzie and Loach/Laverty partnerships, and the developing career as director of Peter Mullan' (ibid.: 776), today seems undesirable and unfeasible in equal measure.

It is certainly the case that a self-consciously inclusive (and often internationally focused) imperative has defined much of the most significant Scottish cinema scholarship published in recent years. Duncan Petrie (2004: 206) perhaps started a collective process of critical recalibration by stressing 'the crucial dialectical interplay of the indigenous and the international, the specific and the general, the local and the global' which he increasingly saw at work within

Scottish moving image cultures. David Martin-Jones (2009: 1) built on this insight by professing a desire to 'not focus solely on films made by Scots, about Scots, for Scots' within his tellingly titled monograph *Scotland: Global Cinema*. Of the 22 post-1990 features which Martin-Jones' book discusses, more than one-third are mobile, rather than indigenous, productions, and more than half are directed by non-resident overseas film-makers. Elsewhere, Sarah Neely (2008: 161) discerns 'a recent trend in Scottish cinema, where issues of national identity are dealt with more tentatively', and argues that 'the opening-up of modes of discourse within Scottish film-making should also be reflected in [Scottish] film criticism' (ibid.: 162). Most recently, Simon Brown (2011) has suggested that 'transnationalism... offers a broader, more inclusive approach to New Scottish Cinema, [one which] encompasses, rather than eclipses, the national' (see also Street 2009). The present essay echoes the overarching tenor of these critical interventions by identifying and examining the two important strands of 2000s Scottish film-making singled out for analysis above.

A still ongoing process of collaboration between individuals and institutions working within the Scottish and Danish production sectors represents perhaps the most visible example of contemporary Scottish cinema's systematic move beyond a single set of national borders in both industrial and representational terms. Something like one in five of the early twenty-first-century fiction features produced with a significant element of Scottish financial and/or creative input emerged from what Mette Hjort (2010: 46) terms a strategic process of 'milieu-developing transnationalism' overseen from opposite sides of the North Sea. Early co-production initiatives at the start of the 2000s, such as *Aberdeen* (Hans Petter Moland, GB/Nor/Swe, 2000) and *The Last Great Wilderness*, instigated a fertile tradition of transnational cooperation, one which has regularly involved other Scandinavian and European film industries over and above those of Scotland and Denmark. The result has been a relatively large number of Scottish-set but internationally co-produced features: *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* (Lone Scherfig, Den/GB/Swe/Fr, 2002), *Skagerrak* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Den/Swe/GB/Sp/Ger/Fr/Swi, 2003), *One Last Chance* (Stewart Svaasand, GB/Nor, 2004), *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, GB/Den, 2006), *Donkeys* (Morag McKinnon, GB/Den, 2010) and *Perfect Sense* (David Mackenzie, Ger/GB/Swe/Den, 2011).

As Robin MacPherson (2010) notes, the cornerstone of recent Scottish-Scandinavian collaboration has been a long-term working relationship built by the two central production companies behind *The Last Great Wilderness*, Glasgow-based Sigma Films and

Copenhagen-based Zentropa Entertainments. Speaking in 2004, producer Gillian Berrie, co-founder of Sigma, was unapologetically direct in acknowledging the extent to which her company sought to learn from and emulate the example set by its internationally successful Danish counterpart, arguing that 'all I'm doing is what they did in Denmark' (Phelan 2004). Of the eight Scottish-Scandinavian features noted above, only two (*Aberdeen, One Last Chance*) were produced without either Sigma or Zentropa's involvement. Sigma participated, moreover, in a further eight non-Scottish-set co-productions with Zentropa: *Dogville* (Lars von Trier, Den/Swe/GB/Fr/Ger/Neth/Nor/Fin, 2003), *Brothers* (Susanne Bier, Den/GB/Swe/Nor, 2004), *The Judge* (Gert Fredholm, Den/GB, 2005), *Manderlay* (Lars von Trier, Den/Swe/Neth/Fr/Ger/GB/It, 2005), *Zozo* (Josef Fares, Swe/Cze/GB/Den/Neth, 2005), *1:1* (Annette Olesen, Den/GB, 2006), *After the Wedding* (Susanne Bier, Den/Swe/GB/Nor, 2006), *When Children Play in the Sky* (Lorenzo Hendel, It/Den/Ice/GB/Ire, 2006). Of course, these features, by virtue of their narrative settings and/or the national identity of their writers/directors/characters, have no immediately obvious substantive connection to Scotland. Yet this generally overlooked aspect of Sigma's output is not irrelevant to the development of Scottish cinema in the 2000s.

For one thing, five of the eight projects noted immediately above are concerned with issues of increasing ethnic diversity within small northern European nations and/or evince a deepening local awareness of the relationship between those societies and complex, because globalised, networks of neo-colonial economic exploitation and military conflict. Contemporary Scottish film-makers' deepening interest in just such themes constituted a significant element of that country's early twenty-first-century cinematic output. Sigma's involvement in a range of non-Scottish-set international co-productions represents, then, an additional facet to the contemporary domestic turn towards questions of race and racism. For another, the extensive experience of European co-production which Sigma's Danish connections facilitated helps explain the company's striking success in maintaining a rolling slate of feature projects over the last decade. In addition to Sigma's direct involvement in the fourteen transnationally financed projects listed above, the company produced or co-produced another five Scottish-set features during the same period: *Young Adam* (David Mackenzie, GB/Fr, 2003), *Dear Frankie* (Shona Auerbach, GB, 2004), *Hallam Foe* (David Mackenzie, GB, 2007), *You Instead* (David Mackenzie, GB, 2011) and *Citadel* (Ciaran Foy, GB/Ire, 2011). In this respect, Sigma represents easily the

most substantive achievement of a key aspiration voiced at the end of the late-1990s indigenous production boom. Film-makers and policy-makers alike started to propose that Scottish cinema's long-term industrial security and expansion would be dependent upon indigenous independents' success in developing rolling slates of production, rather than a fragmented and unpredictable series of one-off feature projects (Hunter 1999, 2000). Sigma's collaborative endeavours with Zentropa helped to mould a Scottish independent with the international experience and profile necessary to undertake a range of feature productions over and above those which involved Danish colleagues.

Scandinavian involvement within 2000s Scottish cinema also exerted a marked degree of influence over representational trends during the period. Locally set co-productions with Nordic partners contributed substantially to a wider contemporary qualification or circumnavigation of national identity's traditional pre-eminence within Scottish film-making. More than half—*Aberdeen*, *Skagerrak*, *Wilbur* . . . , *One Last Chance*, *Red Road*, *Perfect Sense*—of the eight 2000s Scottish-Scandinavian co-productions located in Scotland were, for example, written and/or directed by overseas film-makers. The notable presence of such artists within 2000s Scotland can perhaps be ascribed to an overarching commercial, rather than cultural, agenda. From certain Nordic perspectives, Scotland appeared an alluringly convenient beachhead from which to consolidate post-Dogme Scandinavian cinemas' provisionally expanded foothold within Anglophone theatrical markets. In late 2002, for instance, Zentropa President Peter Aalbæk Jensen argued that, 'today it is impossible to package a film with a budget exceeding \$3m, if you insist on shooting it with Danish dialogue . . . foreign financiers will never place their money in a Danish-language film. We would have made [*Wilbur* . . .] in Danish, had the costs not been so high' (European Film Promotion 2002). Foreign film-makers' understandably limited knowledge or experience of Scottish cultural minutiae entailed that, for the most part, questions of national identity were not prioritised within the work which they produced on Scottish soil. During the 2003 Edinburgh International Film Festival, *Wilbur* . . . co-writer Anders Thomas Jensen argued of his film that 'I don't know if the film is Scotland . . . for me it's the way [director] Lone [Scherfig] and I think Scotland is' (Script Factory 2003).

Such pronounced disinterest in accurate or politically engaged local nuance is worth noting, as Jensen's attitude finds numerous echoes within the corpus of 2000s Scottish-set Scandinavian co-productions.

The titles of many of the films in question, for instance, deploy place names in a deliberately misleading manner. The monikers of such works seem at first sight to promise the pleasures of rooted location within a specific and stable physical and cultural milieu; yet the films in question instead transport their viewers to a series of far more diffuse and diverse interior spaces, ones associated with the displaced and distressed psyches of often mobile and non-native central protagonists. Thus the eponymous *Skagerrak* of Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's 2003 feature is not a remote rural region of Denmark, but a Glaswegian garage inexplicably named after the former. An attendant sense of carefully cultivated displacement is amplified by the work's convoluted tale of mistaken identity and misplaced desire played out between three Irish, Danish and American incomers to Scotland (two female best friends, one male). *Skagerrak*'s carefree cosmopolitanism is essentially that of the raucous foreign females at the movie's heart. Tellingly, this central pairing adopts Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)' – a song co-written and sung by a Scotswoman, but narrated by a peripatetic protagonist who endlessly 'travel[s] the world and the seven seas' – as their personal anthem, playing or performing the track at numerous points across the narrative.

The title of writer/director Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* also proves to be a red herring. Instead of close engagement with local specificity – Red Road is a Glasgow street address – this film's name refers primarily to the idea of a place, and a personal journey one takes to reach it, conceived in terms psychological, not physical. Arnold notes, for instance, that:

I started from the character and [her] emotional place, so I'd say the story is about Jackie and her journey ... it could be universal ... I didn't know Glasgow ... as I was writing I was incorporating what I was seeing and the Red Road flats came into the story ... the film shows a certain side of Glasgow and not [the city's] whole self. (Rowin 2006)

The developmental process which the film-maker describes here is perhaps reflected in the fact that almost eighteen minutes of the movie's narrative elapse before the titular tower blocks of dilapidated Glaswegian public housing are explicitly shown and named. Yet before that point, bereaved central character Jackie (Kate Dickie) sees, or is seen against, no fewer than ten examples of red-hued *mise en scène* (a symbolic motif which persists throughout the work's duration). Of these early instances, eight are clearly linked in some way to ideas of sexuality and procreation. These central aspects of human experience are precisely what Jackie has tried to divorce herself from, in an act

of perverse self-preservation provoked by the unexpected loss of her partner and child in a motor accident a decade previously. The 'red road' which a partially healed main protagonist chooses to traverse by the film's conclusion does not refer, then, to a public domicile. Rather, it offers a metaphorical understanding of the unpredictable individual life journey which Jackie's renewed openness to the possibility of intimate emotional and physical contact with others will entail.

Andrea Arnold's creative priorities, speaking as they do of a desire to circumvent or downplay questions of cultural specificity and national representation, do not appear to have been a phenomenon which emerged over time as local film-makers acquired enhanced experience of collaborating across European borders. This kind of artistic agenda seems, in fact, to have been built into 2000s Scottish-Scandinavian cinema from the movement's very outset. A symptomatically deceptive use of place names is present, for instance, within the decade's earliest Scottish-Scandinavian co-productions. *The Last Great Wilderness* represented the first collaboration between Sigma and Zentropa, and the Glaswegian company's first involvement in a feature-length project. David Mackenzie's film names itself after a popular way of describing the Scottish Highlands, and takes knowing advantage of a narrative device familiar from innumerable twentieth-century Scottish-set but overseas-produced works: the idea of strangers crossing the border into Scotland and finding themselves radically transformed by their immersion within a quasi-magical national sphere (Murray 2005: 15). This aspect of the work undoubtedly opens it up to the possibility of readings which stress issues of national identity and representation. Thus David Martin-Jones interprets the film as a post-devolution allegory, one in which

the Englishman [central protagonist Charlie (Alastair Mackenzie)] firstly comes to terms with the separate identity of the Scottish, and then accepts his own status as part of a newly independent nation... the knowledge that he takes with him on departure [from Scotland is] of England's ability to function independently of Britain. (2005: 233)

Yet when *The Last Great Wilderness* is set alongside other 2000s Scottish-Scandinavian co-productions rather than a longer British/Hollywood tradition of incomer narratives, a non-nationally specific reading seems both more obvious and plausible. Like *Skagerrak* or *Red Road*, Mackenzie's film is self-consciously concerned with psychological questions—understanding the transformations which take place within characters—rather than with national ones—commenting upon the identity of the place within which individual metamorphoses unfold.

Near the work's conclusion, one protagonist, a deeply unconventional Scottish psychotherapist, points towards his own heart, observing that, 'the last great wilderness is not 'out there' . . . it's in here.' In this and other ways, *The Last Great Wilderness* sets a template followed in time by most other Scottish-Scandinavian features, interested primarily in the exploration of psychological hinterlands as opposed to physical Scottish Highlands.

Finally, one might argue something very similar of Hans Petter Moland's *Aberdeen*, a co-production that predated *The Last Great Wilderness* by some two years, and which, unlike the latter film, was written and directed by Scandinavian, not Scottish, artists. Kaisa (Lena Headey), a promiscuous, cocaine-addicted young corporate worker in the City of London, is unwillingly reunited with Tomas (Stellan Skarsgård), her estranged alcoholic Norwegian father. The pair endure a constantly interrupted and diverted journey from Norway to Aberdeen, where Helen (Charlotte Rampling), Tomas' ex-wife and Kaisa's mother, is dying of cancer. On the one hand, the nature of *Aberdeen's* plot and Kaisa's periodic utterances about the importance of reaching the Scottish city of that name – 'I want to leave straight away – for Aberdeen' – appear to signify the centrality of place within this work. Yet this assumption is complicated by several different factors. Firstly, as David Martin-Jones (2009: 64) notes, *Aberdeen* is a road movie where 'many scenes take place in unidentified or anonymous locations, including airports, a caravan park, a cathedral ruin . . . no attempt [is] made to integrate characters and locations'. Secondly (and perhaps more fundamentally), the film suggests that Kaisa's need to return home represents an emotional, rather than literal, longing. *Aberdeen* opens with archive Super 8 footage that documents happier times within a later broken family. An infant Kaisa joyfully welcomes Tomas home from an offshore stint on a North Sea oil rig; Chet Baker's version of the Hoagy Carmichael standard 'I Get Along Without You Very Well' plays on the soundtrack. These images then briefly reappear some 20 minutes into the film's narrative, by which time the now middle-aged Tomas' addictive self-degradation has been made abundantly clear. As a result, both the presence and significance of a physical detail easy to overlook during the first appearance of the Super 8 shots become pointedly apparent: in the mid-distance behind embracing father and prepubescent daughter, an Aberdeen place name sign hangs. The practical difficulties which Kaisa and Tomas each precipitate as they try to reach the northern Scottish hospital where Helen lies dying therefore perform a number of different narrative functions. As well as generating suspense, they

illustrate the elusive (but therefore seductive) nature of the place which traumatised Kaisa truly yearns to revisit: 'home' in the sense of a functional family unit, rather than a particular city or country in which three people once shared a roof.

The collaboration with Scandinavian counterparts was of pronounced significance for Scottish cinema during the 2000s which, as the decade wore on, increasingly transcended nationally exclusive or essentialist concerns, both industrial and representational. Of comparable importance in this regard was the turn by local film-makers towards an exploration of questions of ethnicity and race. In stark contrast to late twentieth-century English cinema (see, for example, Pines 2008; Korte and Sternberg 2008), representation of ethnic diversity proved conspicuously absent from Scottish film-making of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Writing in 1982 about an early 1950s Scottish film, *The Gorbals Story* (David MacKane, GB, 1950), John Hill argued that a work notable and novel for its inclusion of a Scots-Pakistani protagonist ultimately 'signifies cultural and ethnic difference . . . only to go on and deny it under an umbrella of universalised humanism' (106). The terms of Hill's microcosmic analysis could, perhaps, be modified to offer one speculative macrocosmic explanation for the near-total whiteness of Scottish cinema before the new century's dawn. Prior to this point, a dominant umbrella of universalised *nationalism* – the dominant principle, whether articulated by film critics, film-makers or film funders, of indigenous feature production as a vehicle for national representation and self-expression – held sway. Such hegemony encouraged the production – whether on the silver screen or the printed page – of totalising assertions about a Scottish identity and society conceived in the singular. Explorations and articulations of sub-national cultural heterogeneity were marginalised as a result.

During the early twenty-first century, however, a significant proportion of contemporary Scottish cinema has seen local film-makers tackle questions of ethnic diversity and conflict directly and in detail. This important turn has complicated Scottish cinema's traditionally asserted umbilical link to domestic issues of national identity, and this is so in a number of different ways. Firstly, many of the movies concerned – *Gas Attack* (Kenny Glenaan, GB, 2001), *Yasmin* (Kenny Glenaan, Ger/GB, 2004), *Tickets* (Abbas Kiarostami/Ken Loach/Ermanno Olmi, It/GB, 2005), *Cargo* (Clive Gordon, Sp/GB/Swe, 2006), *True North* (Steve Hudson, Ger/Ire/GB, 2006), *Trouble Sleeping* (Robert Rae, GB, 2008), *Outcast* – examine the experience of non-Scottish protagonists, whether newly arrived in that country or located outwith its borders. Secondly, several of the films in question – *Yasmin*,

Cargo, *True North*, *The Last King of Scotland*—are wholly or mostly set outside of Scotland. Finally, even when set within Scotland, a large proportion of these works—*Gas Attack*, *Ae Fond Kiss* (Ken Loach, GB/Bel/Ger/It/Sp, 2004), *Nina's Heavenly Delights* (Pratibha Parmar, GB, 2006), *Trouble Sleeping*—are explicitly concerned to acknowledge modern Scotland's increasingly multicultural make-up. In such ways, films of this ilk call definitive and/or comprehensive prescriptions of a single overarching Scottish culture and identity into serious question.

Gas Attack, Kenny Glenaan's debut feature, examines the traumatic and socially deprived experience of many within Scotland's refugee communities by narrating a fictional account of a racially motivated anthrax attack on Kurdish immigrants housed in a Glaswegian tower block. For Glenaan, 'immigration is the big story of the twenty-first century' (Drew 2003). *Gas Attack* diagnoses some of the contradictions and hypocrisies inherent within Scottish governmental policy towards immigration, underscoring the extent to which cities like Glasgow were willing to 'welcome' significant numbers of political refugees to Scotland at the turn of the century, not as a matter of principle, but due to the financial attraction of large European Union grants offered in support of such action. Glenaan's next feature, *Yasmin*, tackled closely related subject matter. That film's eponymous central character is a young Northern English-Pakistani woman forced, by a British state-sponsored post-9/11 upsurge in Islamophobia, to renegotiate the already conflicted terms of her bifurcated cultural heritage and identity. Glenaan noted that his aim here was to highlight the existence of 'an invisible war happening in Britain which British Caucasians may or may not see ... for the Muslims of our country, it's similar to being Irish in the '70s and '80s—guilty until proven innocent' (Jennings 2005).

Several other post-2000 Scottish features echo Glenaan's perception of immigration into contemporary Scotland/Britain as a vehicle through which fear of the Other can be mobilised for reactionary ends and with inhuman consequences. *True North* tells the story of a Scottish father-and-son fishing trawler, the ironically named *Providence*, fighting a losing battle to meet monthly mortgage repayments. The unending financial worries endured by Sean (Martin Compston), the son of the boat's unnamed skipper (Gary Lewis), lead the young man into people trafficking. Sean's decision to conceal a group of Chinese migrants in the boat's hold and smuggle them from the Belgian port of Ostend to Scotland has disastrous consequences for all concerned. As this brief plot summary might suggest, *True North*'s most audacious ideological decision involves the film's deliberately one-sided focus on, and consequent alignment of audience identification with, the

perspective of Scottish smugglers rather than the smuggled Chinese. For writer/director Steve Hudson, 'there have been several very strong films that have told illegal immigrants' stories from their point of view. What really interested me, though, was to make a film from the point of view of people smugglers' (Pinto 2007). The *Providence* and its small native crew therefore come to function as a metaphor for hegemonic Scottish (and, indeed, Western European) attitudes towards the issue of mass migration. Establishing shots of the boat at sea and docking at Ostend during the film's opening titles highlight not only the vessel's name, but also the proximity of a painted St Andrew's Cross to this. The political perspectives on display within a microcosmic version of Fortress Scotland/Europe range from the clueless (the ship's cook) though the compromised (Sean) to the downright callous (the skipper). *True North*'s deliberate dehumanisation of its mostly unseen migrant cargo can be understood as an attempt to emphasise, rather than obscure, the routine inhumanity that characterises much party political and media discourse around the subject of immigration. Domestic viewers are challenged to ask themselves whether, in an ideological sense, their personal beliefs and prejudices place them in the same boat as the misguided crew of the *Providence*.

A closely related set of narrative and political strategies to those at work in *True North* can be discerned within *Cargo*, a Spanish-British-Swedish co-production scripted by the Scottish screenwriter Paul Laverty. Chris (Daniel Brühl), a young white German man, stows away beneath deck on the *Gull*, a cargo ship sailing back to Europe from an unnamed African port city. His illicit presence quickly discovered, Chris is offered free and safe passage by Brookes (Peter Mullan), the vessel's taciturn, enigmatic captain, in return for unpaid labour during the voyage home. But that journey proves to be no pleasure cruise. Chris is not the ship's only unauthorised passenger: the crew hunt down and throw overboard desperate African stowaways who also secreted themselves in the hold. Brookes invites a morally repulsed Chris, who by now knows too much, to join the crew and save his skin. Chris first succumbs, pushing a female stowaway overboard to her apparent death, then repents, leaping after her and drowning in the ocean's waters. A distraught Brookes (who had seen Chris as a possible surrogate replacement for his own dead child) orders the crew to abandon ship and 'save your miserable souls'. The jettisoned stowaway manages to clamber back on board and strikes out in a lifeboat for the European coast now visible on the horizon.

Chris's exposed situation throughout *Cargo*'s narrative acts as an empathy-inducing proxy for the comparably powerless position

of penniless and illegal Third World would-be migrants. In this way, the film encourages viewers to identify with non-white, non-European characters and human experiences which are defined by systematically policed and preserved economic disadvantage. Equally counterintuitive to Chris's unlikely status as a cipher for African experience is the extent to which *Cargo*, a work centrally concerned with themes of neo-colonial economic exploitation and inequality, pursues little direct investigation of the contemporary geopolitical mechanics which underpin such phenomena. The closest the movie comes in this regard is, perhaps, an unanswered question posed sneeringly and in passing by Brookes. The *Gull's* legitimate cargo is African cocoa, and the ship's captain asks Chris if the young man has ever considered why European shops are not full of chocolate bars which are manufactured and sold by companies owned within the same continent where the raw materials necessary to make such confectionary products are found. Instead of following up such detailed lines of questioning, *Cargo* instead adopts a parable-like approach to its central political conundrum. Lead actor Peter Mullan, for example, presents the film as 'one great big allegory about globalisation and what it does to people. The ship is very much the symbol of the rotting vessel of capitalism trundling through the waters destroying any weakness that it sees' (Archibald 2005). Paul Laverty's script certainly proceeds by metaphor rather than manifesto, a fact indicated by the Biblical source (Luke's Gospel) of the enigmatic graffito which Chris encounters while scrubbing the ship's toilets: 'for nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest'. Ultimately, the 'secret' which *Cargo* makes 'manifest', the obscured truth which Chris uncovers within the *Gull's* dark hold (and Brookes pointedly persists in asking the young man if he knows yet what lurks unseen within that shadowy space), is not a comprehensive, fact-based understanding of a colonialist global economic system's material workings. Rather, it is what Brookes terms, in a Conradian-cum-Darwinian voice-over monologue which begins the film, 'the filth of it all': the animalistic and perhaps innate aspects of human nature which allow the species to first construct, then subsequently countenance, grossly exploitative socio-economic relations among individuals, nations and entire continents.

The work of Paul Laverty seems especially important to mention in the context of contemporary Scottish cinematic explorations of ethnic diversity and colonial conflict. More than any other local film-maker, Laverty has returned time and again to such territory over the last decade and a half. Perhaps key in this regard is the writer's script for Ken Loach's *Ae Fond Kiss*, a romantic melodrama charting the

course of a true love which runs anything but smooth. Romance is a troubled affair within this film precisely because its creators aimed to acknowledge and anatomise the existence and effects of a range of complex conflicts between – and, just as importantly, *within* – different cultures and communities which coexist uneasily within early twenty-first-century Glasgow. Like Kenny Glenaan's *Yasmin*, the genesis of *Ae Fond Kiss* stemmed from a troubled awareness of rising levels of racial tension and prejudice within post-9/11 British society. Laverty noted how:

One of my friends from a traditional Muslim background told me her niece, who was born in Glasgow, was scared to go out. That really got to me ... it made me want to examine what was going on ... when Catholics first came to Scotland 150 years ago they were seen as aliens with a loyalty to something foreign to the indigenous population. (Mottram 2004: 23)

Thus in Laverty's script Casim (Atta Yaqub), the early twenty-something son of first-generation Pakistani Scots, starts a relationship with Roisin (Eva Birthistle), a white, Roman Catholic Irish immigrant who teaches music at a local secondary school. The couple move in together and Casim is estranged from his family as a result. Meanwhile, Roisin loses the chance of a permanent teaching post at her school: the local Catholic priest, who has learned of her affair with a Muslim, refuses to provide her with the necessary official Church confirmation of good character. Despite these and a range of other obstacles, *Ae Fond Kiss* ends with Casim and Roisin happily united in her flat. As John Hill (2009: 102) notes, the film actively attempts to 'embrace[...] the continuing possibility of living with new, hybrid forms of cultural identity ... Casim and Roisin ... represent a new kind of social settlement in which a variety of forms of cultural identification and social inheritance may coalesce' within contemporary Scotland and further afield.

It is worth noting the extent to which *Ae Fond Kiss* appears to have consolidated the overarching trajectory of its screenwriter's creative practice. The majority of Laverty's scripts immediately pre- and post-*Ae Fond Kiss* take the long-term consequences of colonialism, both the traditional form practised by sovereign nation states and the modern counterpart essayed by mobile multinational capital, as a narrative and ideological starting point. This is so regardless of whether any given project has been Scottish-set or not, or written for Ken Loach or another director. *Bread and Roses* (Ken Loach, GB/Fr/Ger/Sp/It/Swi, 2000) follows the struggle of low-paid immigrant Latin American workers for union rights in modern-day Los Angeles; Loach and

Lavery's segment of the 2002 portmanteau documentary *11' 9" 01* (Various, GB/Fr/Egy/Jap/Mex/USA/Ir, 2002) links the American 9/11 of 2001 to the Chilean 9/11 of 1973, the US-endorsed *coup d'état* that overthrew the democratically elected Allende government; Lavery's script for *Cargo* is discussed briefly above; *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (Ken Loach, Ire/GB/Ger/It/Sp/Fr/Bel/Swi, 2006) examines the early twentieth-century Irish War of Independence; *It's a Free World . . .* (Ken Loach, GB/It/Ger/Sp/Pol, 2007) highlights endemic exploitation of migrant workers within modern Britain; *Route Irish* (Ken Loach, GB/Fr/It/Bel/Sp, 2010) delves into the murky world of private security contracting in post-Saddam Iraq; *Even the Rain* (Icía Bollaín, Sp/Mex/Fr, 2010) juxtaposes the April 2000 Bolivian Water War with the arrival of Columbus's Spanish colonists in the Americas several centuries previous. Lavery's position within a twenty-first-century Scottish cinematic turn towards questions of race and ethnicity is not unlike that of Sigma Films in relation to the contemporaneous rise of systematic Scottish-Scandinavian creative and financial collaboration. The relatively small size of a cinema such as Scotland's raises the possibility that especially prolific individual *oeuvres* create the illusion of wider industrial and representational trends which in fact possess little or no material substance. In both cases discussed above, however, it seems that the movements in question cannot be reduced to no more than one or two isolated career trajectories.

This essay has argued that Scottish cinema became markedly more diverse during the 2000s than was the case in earlier decades. But if that is really so, then any act of criticism is, by definition, one story about, not the story of, its object of study. Other ways of understanding and engaging with contemporary Scottish film-making abound, some suggested or implied by this piece, others lying beyond its scope. Yet I would argue that any remotely comprehensive or responsive study of Scottish cinema must be open to a number of overarching precepts. Firstly, that a maturing indigenous sector is now firmly embedded within transnational networks of financial and creative exchange. Of the 28 features supported by indigenous sources of public finance between 1983 and 2000 which Duncan Petrie (2000a: 227–8) lists, less than half (ten) were international co-productions. But of the 43 post-2000 films identified above as incorporating a degree of Scottish financial and/or creative involvement, the corresponding figure rises to 33. This in turn points to a second precept: Scottish cinema in the twenty-first century routinely incorporates work made by overseas artists working in Scotland and by Scottish artists working overseas. Twenty of Petrie's 28 indigenously supported features between 1983

and 2000 are locally set; of the 43 post-2000 films cited by the present discussion, the equivalent figure is but seventeen. Eighteen of Petrie's late twentieth-century sample were directed by film-makers who are Scottish by birth; the same is true of only eleven out of the 43 works surveyed within these pages.

Of course, any choice to understand contemporary Scottish cinema as something which 'exists in the midst of, and interjects in various ways with, the increasingly decentralised flows of film production and distribution that circulate the globe' (Martin-Jones 2009: 11) poses a vexed, but potentially productive, fundamental question. What might one today recognise as 'a Scottish film', and with what critical purposes in mind? Robin MacPherson (2011) cautions, for instance, against an anything goes form of 'journalistic boosterism' which he sees at work within recent press identification of *Wuthering Heights* (Andrea Arnold, GB, 2011) as a 'Scottish' movie purely because its director (Andrea Arnold) and producer (Douglas Rae) happen to have shot and set earlier feature projects in that country. From such a perspective, many of the films which the present discussion cites as Scottish may well cause eyebrows to be raised.

Two points may be made in response to such scepticism. Firstly, Scottish cinema has by 2012 attained a level of critical mass sufficient to render pragmatic questions of how best to create, consolidate and grow a fragile indigenous production sector just one of several important agendas which critical analysis needs to pursue. One of the latter involves documenting the extent to which the significant gains of the late 1990s gave birth to a substantial nucleus of local film-making talent which spent the next decade entrenching and enhancing individual careers by working both at home and abroad. Of course, the precise nature and significance of the forces which drove that development are open to question. Director Paul McGuigan, for example, proposes that the internationalisation of his *oeuvre* – *Gangster No. 1* (GB/Ger/Ire, 2000), *The Reckoning* (GB/Sp, 2003), *Wicker Park* (USA, 2004), *Lucky Number Slevin* (Ger/USA, 2006), *Push* (USA/Can, 2009) – in the decade since his debut feature, *The Acid House* (GB, 1999), is a symptom of local cinematic failure, not success. For McGuigan, key public bodies such as Scottish Screen 'decimated' a fledgling local production culture during the 2000s, signally failing to foster an 'industry that creates home-grown entertainment and at the same time makes money and creates jobs in Scotland' (Anon. 2009). Elsewhere, the director complains that 'it sometimes seems that the younger generation have... to move away... get a career somewhere else, which is a fucking shame because... [film production]

can make a lot of money for Scotland' (Bodsworth 2010). Although it is outside the present article's scope, a debate does need to take place around the points that McGuigan raises. That process would take in a large number of vexed issues, including changing levels of public finance available for Scottish film production over the last decade and a retrospective assessment of the strategic priorities which moved key funders of the period (such as Scottish Screen) to distribute the monies at their disposal in the precise ways that they did. Yet for the specific purposes of the discussion presented here, the main point to determine is not whether McGuigan's analysis is 'right' or 'wrong'. Rather, it is to understand that his individual career trajectory, like those of most of the native Scottish film-makers discussed above, illustrates the extent to which, given the way in which Scottish cinema has developed over the last decade, we blind ourselves in one eye if we refuse to accept that both indigenous and international components of increasingly globalised creative careers ought to be explored in tandem. The comparative absence of significant works such as *Housekeeping* (Bill Forsyth, USA, 1986) or *Comrades* (Bill Douglas, GB, 1987) from Scottish cinema literature could at one time be explained away by protestations that artists such as Bill Forsyth and Bill Douglas were, by virtue of their cosmopolitan professional histories, glaring exceptions to a general rule. Such a position is increasingly hard to cleave to today.

The second point to make about the nucleus of local talent which emerged during the late 1990s is that it necessarily diversifies the various types of film-making career which Scottish cinema scholars ought to be interested in following. A near-exclusive traditional focus on the activities of directors is potentially as blinkered a critical approach as the one which prefers to admit only films shot and set on home soil to the Scottish cinematic canon. Instead, the analysis presented here has traced directing, scriptwriting and producing careers in its identification of a broad range of early twenty-first-century feature work which can, in a variety of ways, be justifiably understood to be Scottish in some significant way. Yet fully detailed accounts of important Scottish producing—Gillian Berrie, Andrea Calderwood, Andrew Macdonald, Chris Yong—writing—Andrea Gibb, David Kane, Paul Laverty, Jack Lothian—and acting—Gary Lewis, Ewan McGregor, Peter Mullan—careers which have flourished since the mid-1990s are still to be written. As suggested above, the new century's first decade witnessed a welcome and unprecedented proliferation of modes within Scottish film-making. To document that phenomenon, Scottish film criticism must first prove willing to duplicate it.

Note

1. In this journal we do not normally give films' countries of origin, nor the name of the director of every film cited. In this case, however, these details are crucial to the article's argument [eds].

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